



Central Coast

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Best Places to Eat

- » Passionfish (p470)
- » Cracked Crab (p503)
- » Cass House Restaurant (p485)
- » San Luis Obispo Farmers Market (p495)
- » Bouchon (p515)

Best Places to Stay

- » Post Ranch Inn (p478)
- » Inn of the Spanish Garden (p514)
- » Cass House Inn (p484)
- » El Capitan Canyon (p514)
- » Dream Inn (p453)

Why Go?

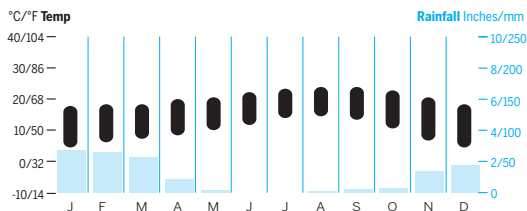
Too often forgotten or dismissed as ‘flyover’ country between San Francisco and LA, this fairytale stretch of California coast is packed with wild Pacific beaches, misty redwood forests where hot springs hide, and rolling golden hills of fertile vineyards and farm fields.

Here Hwy 1 pulls out all the stops, scenery-wise. Flower-power Santa Cruz and the historic port town of Monterey are gateways to the rugged wild lands of the bohemian Big Sur coast. It’s an epic journey snaking down to vainglorious Hearst Castle, past lighthouses and cliffs over which condors soar.

Or get acquainted with California’s agricultural heartland along inland Hwy 101, called El Camino Real (the King’s Highway) by Spanish conquistadors and Franciscan friars. Then soothe your nature-loving soul between laid-back San Luis Obispo and idyllic seaside Santa Barbara, just a short hop from the Channel Islands.

When to Go

Santa Barbara



Apr Balmy temperatures and fewer tourists than summer. Wildflowers bloom.

Jul Summer vacation and beach season kick off; SoCal ocean waters warm up.

Oct Sunny blue skies, yet smaller crowds. Wine country harvests celebrated.



Central Coast Highlights

- 1 Scream your head off aboard the Giant Dipper on the beach boardwalk, then learn to surf in **Santa Cruz** (p451)
- 2 Cruise Hwy 1, where the sky touches the sea, along the rocky coastline of fairytale **Big Sur** (p473)
- 3 Soak up the chic atmosphere of whitewashed,

- red-tiled **Santa Barbara** (p509) before making your wine-country escape
- 4 Brings the kids to gawk at the aquatic denizens of the 'indoor ocean' at the **Monterey Bay Aquarium** (p460)
- 5 Marvel in disbelief at the grandiosity of **Hearst Castle** (p481) after meeting

- the neighbors: ginormous elephant seals
- 6 Hang loose in college-town **San Luis Obispo** (p494), surrounded by bodacious beaches and parklands
- 7 Explore down-to-earth novelist John Steinbeck's blue-collar world in the agricultural valley town of **Salinas** (p489)